English
M 492.E7

Glasgow
University Library

b 290-1923

Pro - h - III

English
NM 492.E7
1922

Book No. 0993867
30114 009938674

ESTHER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A POEM AND TWO PLAYS

LOLLINGDON DOWNS AND OTHER POEMS

THE FAITHFUL: A PLAY

PHILIP THE KING AND OTHER POEMS

THE DAFFODIL FIELDS

DAUBER: A POEM

GOOD FRIDAY: A PLAY IN VERSE

ENSLAVED AND OTHER POEMS

REYNARD THE FOX

RIGHT ROYAL

ALSO

GALLIPOLI
One volume, cr. 8vo, illustrated, 2s. 6d. net

THE OLD FRONT LINE
Cr. 8vo, illustrated, 2s. 6d. net

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

London: WILLIAM HEINEMANN.

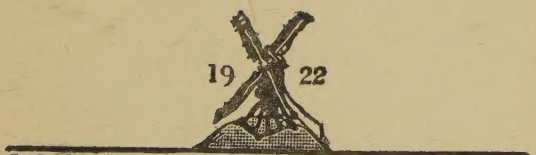
ESTHER

A Tragedy

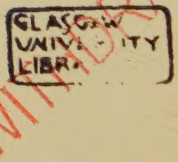
Adapted and partially translated from the French of Jean Racine

By

JOHN MASEFIELD



LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN



WITHDRAWN

CHARACTERS.

ESTHER.
RACHEL.
MORDECAI.
HAMAN.
HYDASPES.
AHASUERUS.
ASAPH.
ZERESH.

CHORUS OF JEWISH CHILDREN.
GUARDS, ETC.

This adaptation of "Esther" was produced by Miss Penelope Wheeler, at Wootton, Berks, on the evening of the 5th May, 1921, with the following cast:—

ESTHER	...	Miss Penelope Wheeler.
RACHEL	...	Miss Geraldine Berkeley
MORDECAI	...	Mr. Richard Elwes.
HAMAN	...	Mr. Kenneth Rae.
HYDASPES	...	Mr. W. H. Nurse.
AHASUERUS		Mr. Eric Dance.
ASAPH	...	Mr. James Pearce.
ZERESH	...	Mrs. Vidler.
CHORUS	...	Miss Katharine Richards. Miss Judith Masefield
GUARD	...	Mr. P. Venables.

The Play was performed without scenery upon a stage hung with curtains. There were exits and entrances R. and L. at Back, and an extra exit and approach by steps to the stage from Front Centre

PROPERTIES.

Act I.

Settle with cushions, to Left.
Seats for Chorus, Left, with rug.
Orders for Mordecai, Right.

Act II.

Couch R. for Ahasuerus, with cushions and cover.
Sword at foot of bed.
Stool at foot of bed.
Cup for drink, Left, off.
Bell for clink, Right, off.
Drum, Left, off, with the Guards, for their singing.
Battens to keep couch steady.

Act III.

Settle, *bedecked*, to the Right, with new covers and cushions, as the throne.
Sceptre, Ahasuerus } Right.
Roll or scroll, Ahasuerus }
Spear for Guard.

Act IV.

Throne, bedecked as in Act III, but Centre.
Fruit and two brass dishes for feast (oranges and lemons only).
Bronze bowls and cups for feast.
Stool for feast.
Orders, Right, off, for Ahasuerus, when he goes out.
Second stool or footstool to Right of throne.
Signet for Asaph to give to the King, Right.

ACT I.

SCENE.—Esther's apartments.

[Esther enters back scene door L. of Esther.]

Rachel. *Esther.*

ESTHER.

O Rachel, is it you? How happy day!
O blessed heaven, which sends you to my prayers.
You did not know that I was made the Queen?
More than six months my friends have sought
for you.
Where have you been?

[*They sit centre.*]

RACHEL.

I heard that you were dead.
And hearing this, I lived most miserably,
Until a prophet told me, "Do not weep.
But rise, leave this, and take the mountain road;
There you will see your father crowned the
Queen.
And on your way comfort the wretched tribes;
Tell them the day approacheth when our God
Will send His comfort with a powerful arm."
I heard his words, and hurried to the palace.

Marvellous it is that proud Ahasuerus
Has crowned his captive, made a *Jewess* Queen.
O by what hidden ways, what strange events,
Has Heaven led you, to this great position?

ESTHER.

Have they not told you of the great disgrace
Of the proud Vashti, queen before my coming?
The King divorced her, but when she was gone
His mind was troubled, and he sought for one
To bring him comfort.
They sought throughout the world in every land
To find a Queen.
I, as an orphan, lived alone and hidden
Under the care of watchful Mordecai:
He is my uncle, and he tended me.
Sad for the trouble of the captive Jews,
He told me all his secret plans, and I
Obeyed his wish, and sought to be the Queen.
Who could express the plots and counter-plots
Of all these courtiers, striving for the honour,
Striving to catch Ahasuerus' eyes.
At last Ahasuerus' order came to me,
And I appeared before the mighty King.
Long time he watched me in a sombre silence,
Then gently spoke: "You shall be Queen," he said,
And crowned me with his royal diadem.
Then followed days of joys and festivals;
Esther was Queen, and seated in the purple;
Half of the world was subject to her sceptre.

But grass is growing in Jerusalem,
The stones are scattered from the holy Temple,
The God of Israel's worship is no more.

RACHEL.

Have you not told the King your troubles, Esther?

ESTHER.

The King?
Even now he knows not that I am a Jewess,
For Mordecai keeps it secret still.

RACHEL.

Can Mordecai come about the Court?

ESTHER.

His love for me finds out a thousand ways
To send advice, and me to ask for it.
A Father has less care for his own son.
Already by good Mordecai's cunning
I have laid bare to the King the treacherous plots
Made by two slaves against him.
Meanwhile my love for our beloved race
Has filled the palace with young Jewesses.
Here I can care for them and teach their souls.
Among them, putting by my queenly pride,
I bow myself before the feet of God;
I hide from all the Persians who they are.
[*Calls*]
Come! Come, my daughters,
Companions here of my captivity.

[*Enter* CHORUS, *Left; bow slightly, and come down to front Left. They stand and speak standing.*]

RACHEL.

Innocent children, may God give you peace.

ESTHER.

My daughters, sing us one of those sweet psalms
That tell of Zion.

CHISTORUS.

We cannot sing of Zion without tears.

2ND CHORUS.

How can we sing the happy songs of home
In this strange land?

1ST CHORUS.

All day and every day
The memory of old pleasure comes to us,
Old happy days at home with father and mother,
Our games and birthday feasts, and times at night
When lamps were lit.

RACHEL.

It is too true; their hearts are breaking, Esther.
We exiled captives cannot sing of home.

ESTHER.

Sing of the war, and our captivity.

1ST CHORUS.

The fulness of our hearts is all we have.
We can sing that.

1ST CHORUS.

A myriad Persians came against our town,
Many in number as the blades of grass:
They broke the ramparts of the city down.
They robbed our Temple of its wealth of brass.

They made the captains of our soldiers yield,
They took our Kings and Princes captive there,
They blinded them, and killed them in the field,
They made us slaves: they gave us loads to bear.

Then, on a day, the Persian trumpets sounded;
They brought us from the city. Even as a beast
Bearing a too great burden, we were hounded
Far from our home away into the East.

And, looking back, even as we topped a rise,
We saw, far, far behind, our ruined city
Burning, a spoil to warriors without pity,
And we, the homeless slaves, the warriors' prize.

2ND CHORUS.

Now many a day has passed, and here as slaves,
We toil, with breaking hearts, by tears made blind;
Thinking of our old homes, our fathers' graves,
Lost, like our chance of life, our peace of mind.

Now no foot falls in the houses of our fathers,
But the grass grows green and the fountain pipes are filled
With the ashes, and the ruin, and the burnt-out rafters,
And where once our Kings caroused the sparrows build.

[*Enter* MORDECAI, *Right. He comes down below* RACHEL. *He has his face hidden.*]

o *Rachel*

o o 1 C.

Mordecai o *Esther* o 2 C.

ESTHER.

What profane man dares come into this place?
O Mordecai! Uncle! Is it you?
An angel of the Lord has helped you here.
But why so sad?
Why are you wearing sackcloth
All strown with ashes?

MORDECAI.

O wretched Queen!

[*He turns away from* QUEEN.]

O ghastly fortune of the innocent Jews!
Read, read the awful order that condemns us.
We are all lost, all ruined.

[RACHEL *down to* CHORUS *behind* ESTHER.]

ESTHER.

O Heaven! my blood is frozen in my veins!

MORDECAI.

They are about to massacre the Jews.
All of the Jewish nation is condemned.
Haman, the great King's favourite, plotted this;
The King, believing him, has signed the edict.
He gives his orders and in all his lands
To-morrow is appointed for our murder.

[*Alarm in* CHORUS.]

None of us will be spared, nor sex, nor age,
All of us will be killed and cast aside.
At the fifth hour to-morrow afternoon
The murder will begin.

ESTHER.

O Heaven who sees such plots,
Hast thou forgotten us?

RACHEL.

Heaven, who can guard us if thou dost not guard?

MORDECAI.

Now, Esther, leave all weeping to these children;
You are our only hope, and you must save us.
The time is short and all of us are doomed;
You must go forth and dare to tell the King
That you yourself are Jewish.

ESTHER.

Alas! you do not know what awful laws
Keep timid mortals from the awful King.

Death is the doom of any daring soul
Who comes before the King, not being bidden,
Unless the King think fit to stretch his sceptre
For him to kiss.
All living souls are subject to this law.
Even I, his Queen, am subject to this law.
If I his Queen desire to speak with him.
He must first call for me,
Or send for me.

MORDECAI.

What! when you see your country at death's door,
Is your own life so blessed to you, Esther?
Is not your life due to the Jewish race,
Or due to God Who gave it?
Who knows, if to the throne you bend your steps
To save the Jews, God may protect you there.
O happy you, to risk your life for God!
The God Who vanquishes the kings of earth,
At Whose great Voice the sea flies, the sky trembles.
If He permitted Haman's wicked plot,
Doubtless it was to prove your holy zeal.
O He will vanquish Haman, break our chains,
By the most weak hand in his Universe.
And you, if you do not accept this deed,
Will die with all your race.

[CHORUS *hands out in entreaty to* ESTHER.]

ESTHER.

If I accept the deed,
And if I see the King and live to tell him
That I am Jewish, he will surely kill me
For having kept it secret until now.

MORDECAI.

You could not have been Queen had it been known.
I bade you keep the secret for that reason;
Rightly, I judged it then.

ESTHER.

But it proves wrongly,
It ruins our last hope.

MORDECAI.

It is a hope,
Our only hope, and you must do it, Esther.

ESTHER.

O God, Thou seest the spears that ring us in!

RACHEL.

Esther, dear friend, for these sweet children's sakes
Dare do this deed. Think, Esther; but for you
Their tender limbs will pasture the wild beasts,
And these most innocent lips that sing God's praise
Be silenced, and our Zion desolate ever.
O I beseech you, hasten to the King!

THE CHORUS.

Save us, great Queen! Beseech the King to save us!

ESTHER.

Go! let the Jews in Shushan pray for me,
And watch all night, and keep a solemn fast.
Now it is night; to-morrow at the dawn,
Contented well to die, if die I must,
I'll go, and offer me in sacrifice.

[*They veil.* MORDECAI *out here.*]

O sovereign Lord, kept here among the pagans,
Thou knowest how I loathe their heathen rites;
Thou knowest that this crown, which I must wear
In solemn feasts, I spurn beneath my feet
When I'm alone, prefering ashes to it.
O Lord, I waited for Thy word to come.
Now has the moment come, and I obey;
I go to dare to stand before the King.
It is for Thee I go; Lord, come with me,
To this fierce lion who knows not Thy law;
Grant that he be not angry, let me charm him;
Lord, turn his rage against our enemies.

[*During this speech* ESTHER *comes Right down to foot of stage.*]

1ST CHORUS.

Deliver us from this threatened death, O heaven;
Out of this body of death in which we dwell,
O Spirit, set us free.

2ND CHORUS.

For here, as slaves,
We cannot sing Thy praise, we cannot keep
Thy laws, but live in dread and in despair.

RACHEL.

We had the past. We lived once, long ago.
We do not live now, save in memory.
Now even that little penny-weight of life
Is grudged us, is not spared, is taken from us.

ALL.

O lamentation, misery, woe, woe!

[RACHEL *a little at back of* CHORUS.]

o *Rachel*

o 1 C.

o *Esther*

o 2 C.

CHORUS.

2ND CHORUS [*Spoken sitting*].

In the troubled dreams a slave has ere I waken,
I can see my city shining as of old,
Roof and column of the Temple wreathed in gold;
And the ramparts proud as erst, before the town was taken,
And the well-loved living shapes that now are cold.
Then I wake, a slave, and houseless and forsaken,
Chained, an outcast, and a chattel, bought and sold.

1ST CHORUS [*Sitting*].

Now, for us, no future, but the corn-mill and the stranger
In the foeman's house for ever.
And the cold eyes of a master and the cruel eyes of danger,
And the memory of joys returning never.

We who once were dainty ones and splendid,
Now are slaves who grind the mill beneath a master's blows;
Would that when our fathers ended, we had ended,
That we lay in Zion's soil, at peace with those.

ALL

O lamentation, misery, woe, woe!
o *Rachel*
o 1 C.
o *Esther.*
o 2 C.

1ST AND 2ND CHORUS [*Together, standing*].

Here, from our prison gate, we see again
The never-ending sand, the Persian plain,
The long, long road, the stones that we should tread
Were we but free, to our beloved dead.
And in the Spring the birds fly to the west
Over these deserts that the mountains hem,
They fly to our dear land; they fly to nest;
We cannot go with them.

1ST CHORUS [*Standing*].

And in Springtime from the windows of the tower
I can see the wild horses in the plain,
Treading stately but so lightly that they never break the flower,
And they fade at speed to westward and they never come again.

2ND CHORUS [*Standing*].

And in Springtime at the quays the men of Tyre
Set their ships towards the west and hoist their sail,
And our hearts cry "Take us with you to the land of our desire!"
And they hear our cry but will not take the crier:
The crying of a slave can be of no avail.

TOGETHER [*Move at "Birds"*].

Birds, horses, sailors, all are free to go
To seek their homes beyond the wilderness:
But we, the homeless, only know

[1ST CHORUS *comes across Right below* ESTHER. 2ND CHORUS *comes L., kneels at foot of* ESTHER *centre.*]

Weariful days of wearing-out distress.

O lamentation, misery, woe, woe!

ESTHER, RACHEL AND THE REST [*Speaking in a group in centre*].

Shall we be ever exiled, must it be
That we must pass our days as slaves for ever?
Far from our pleasant land, and never see
Our sacred Hills and Jordan's blessed river.
Shall we not see again thy ramparts rise,
O Zion, and thy splendid towers rebuilt,
And God's great Temple set for sacrifice
By this our race, atoning for our guilt?
Or must our weary footsteps no more tread
The land we love, where those we loved are dead?
No, we shall see that lovely land no more,
Nor anything we loved there, place or friend,
Nor do, nor know, the things we hungered for.
Like darts out of God's Hand our deaths descend
To make an end.

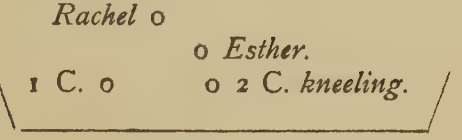
Now we can crouch and pray and count the hours
Until our murderers' feet are on the stair,
And bright steel spirts the blood upon our hair
And lays us motionless among the flowers,
White things that do not care.

And afterwards, who knows what moths we'll be
Flying about the lamps of life at night
In death's great darkness, blindly, blunderingly.

The brook that sings i' the grass knows more
delight,
The ox that the men pole-axe has more peace
Than prisoners' souls ; but now there comes
release—
We shall go home, to death, to-morrow night.
O lamentation, misery, woe, woe!

CURTAIN.

Positions at Curtain :—



ACT II.

[AHASUERUS *on his couch.*]

AHASUERUS.

What is the time? I hear the water drip
Telling the time; and all the Court is still,
Still as the midnight; not a footstep stirs
Save the slow sentry on the palace wall.
No glow of light is in the eastern heaven;
The barren, dwindled moon her ruddy horn
Heaves o'er the tree-tops; it is midnight, sure.
I see Orion falling, and the Dog
Bright at his heels. Deep midnight. Not a sound
Save the most patient mouse that gnaws the wainscot.

[*He rises and walks.*]

O weary Time, I cannot sleep to-night.
All still, all sleep, save only I the King.
And that great city at the palace foot
Lies sleeping; yet a strange fear troubles me
That some there do not sleep, but prepare evil—
Evil against myself, against the King.
Those foreigners whom Haman told me of,
The Jews, who are to die, as Haman urged.
Excellent Haman, guardian of my throne.
It may be that this warning comes too late.

What if those Jews be coming even now
By the black alleys of that sleeping city
Into my palace, up the guarded stairs
From floor to floor, along the corridors,
Stealthily, with masked eyes, with bated breath,
On tiptoe to the threshold of my room.
That captain of my guard has eyed me strangely
These two nights now ; he had an evil look.
He smiled, but still, his eyes : they did not smile.
Where is my sword? It's here. Look at that door.
It moved. Was that the wind? Who stands without?
I see you standing there. Come in there, you.
Who is it?

GUARD [*Off*].

The great King's guard is here.
God save the King! And may he live for ever!

AHASUERUS [*Going right back*].

Give me a cup of drink. I thirst. I thank you.
You men were sleeping when I called for you.
Sing, that I know you watching till I sleep.

[*The* SOLDIERS *hum and sing together.* AHASUERUS *settles to his sleep again. Count 20 slowly. Stop singing gradually. He rouses up and walks again.*]

There is a something evil in this room ;
I seem to give it power by lying down.

It is as though the dark were full of souls
That wait till I am helpless and then come
Out of the corners, out of the air itself,
About my body ; but, being up, they fly.
See, there is nothing here. I pass my hand—
[*He goes round Right and Back feeling the walls.*]
Here, here, and here. I do not like that corner:
Is the thing there? The shadow on the wall
Is like the black head of an African
Thrown back in mockery, and it seems to move—
To move a little forward. It is but shadow.
[*At Left Back.*]
Yes, you are only shadow on the wall,
Not what you thought.
[*He comes down stage.*]
And yet I know this room
Is living with the spirits of evil things;
Spirits of evil things that I have done.
It is so difficult to be a King,
To wear the crown and to be ringed with death;
To order "Thus," with little time to think,
No time to know, but to be just, far-seeing,
Wise, generous, strict and yet most merciful,
As though one knew.
Now one by one they come,
Those plotters who defied me, whom I killed,
Crucified, burned, impaled, or tore with horses,

Men who with white lips cursed me, going to death.

[*He turns facing Left.*]

Yes, you pale ghosts, I mastered you in life,
And will in death. I hold an Empire up,
A thing that IS; no glimmering dream of boys
Of what might be, but will not till men change;
No phantom Paradise of vengeance glutted
By poor men upon rich men, but a world
Rising and doing its work and lying down
Because my fierceness keeps the wolves at bay.
And yet, those Jews, even at my palace door,
So Haman said, have had my death contrived.
What if that captain be in league with them?
Guard! Is Hydaspes there?

GUARD.

He is here, great King. Hydaspes, the King calls.

[HYDASPES *enters Left.*]

HYDASPES.

Lord! Do you call?

AHASUERUS.

Come in. Let fall the hanging. Come you there
Into the moonlight, that I see your face.

[HYDASPES *comes down Left.*]

Let me be sure that no one crawls behind you.
Hold out your hands, so; let me see the fingers.
Stay there. No nearer.
You have travelled far?

HYDASPES.

I have been far, among the Indian lands.

AHASUERUS.

And saw strange peoples?

HYDASPES.

Some.

AHASUERUS.

Which were the strangest?

HYDASPES.

Those of Tibet, who made their pence of gold,
And reckoned costly things by cups of water.

AHASUERUS.

What next seemed strange to you?

HYDASPES.

The Tartar horsemen
Who live on cheese of mare's milk, and go on
For ever over never-ending grass,
And have no home except the black felt tent
And the great plain and the great sky and silence.

AHASUERUS.

A good life, that, for men. Who, next to those?

HYDASPES.

The race of Sittras by the sacred river;
They are all men, grown grey; no women there.

They have put by their wives and families,
Their crowns, their swords, their households and their cares,
And seek for wisdom there, until they die.

AHASUERUS.

Do they find wisdom?

HYDASPES.

No, but they find peace.

AHASUERUS.

Do they, by Heaven; as a dead man does.
Wisdom is life upon the tickle edge,
Not the blind staring of the stupefied
At nothing out of nothing. I envy you
For travelling thus and seeing all these things,
Which I shall only hear of.
Tell me now,
When you were wandering, did you meet the Jews?

HYDASPES.

No, never, Lord.

AHASUERUS.

Nor heard about their race?

HYDASPES.

Not in the East?

AHASUERUS.

But in the West you have?

HYDASPES.

Yes, here at home.

AHASUERUS.

What have you heard?

HYDASPES.

That they are heathen men,
Brought from beyond the desert in the wars;
Not desert savages, nor civilised,
But enemies of both.

AHASUERUS.

Who told you this?

HYDASPES.

Prince Haman told me.

AHASUERUS.

They are now condemned;
They have been plotting here. You do not know
Any of their rebellious stock, by chance?

HYDASPES.

No, Lord, not one.

AHASUERUS.

Go to that door, Hydaspes.
Is someone listening to us, as we speak?

HYDASPES [*Going to door Left.*]

No, Lord; the guard is at the door beyond.

AHASUERUS.

Come nearer me. That captain of the guard,
Is he a Jew?

HYDASPES.

No, Lord, a Persian, surely,
Pordánatha, from lovely Arisai,
The city white like snow; Persian as you.

AHASUERUS.

Thank you, Hydaspes.
These times are dangerous. Go now from here,
See the guards doubled at Queen Esther's doors.
These Jews are secret like that desert tribe
Whom none has seen, who walk the moonless night
And strike men dead, and go, and leave no trace
Save the dead body.

HYDASPES.

I will place the guards
Myself, great King.

[*Exit* HYDASPES, *Left.*]

AHASUERUS.

Esther, the Queen, not yet a trusted Queen.
Not lightly can an Emperor put his trust
In man or woman. She is proud, and pride
Is slow to give or take in confidence.
How the Queen Vashti comes into my mind!
She disobeyed my order at the feast,

So she is put away, and lives in exile.
How little quiet have I known since then!
Plot, plot and counter-plot, and none to comfort,
Nor to advise, as Vashti used to do.
Was it a plot that made her disobey?
I sent Prince Memucan to bring her to me:
He brought back word that she refused to come.
How if Prince Memucan were lying to me?
Misquoting what she said, to make me rage
And put her from her place beside my throne?
For since she went, Prince Memucan has been
About me day and night, and grows in power.
Who are the comrades of Prince Memucan?
Meres, Adathan; but his chiefest friend
Is Haman, my most trusted councillor.
Haman, my friend, to whom I love to give
Princedoms and palaces and silver mines.
And yet, what if the two conspired together
To rid me of the Queen, that they might rule me?
I will send Memucan beyond the seas
Upon some dangerous mission of great honour:
He shall away to-morrow in all haste.
But Haman I can trust.

[*He tries to compose himself to sleep.*]

Princedoms, and palaces, and silver mines,
Pomps, glories, splendours, princedoms, palaces,—
Vashti the Queen, and enemies, and princedoms—
A long, long life, and heavy hours of time!

[*He sleeps. A clink of metal to mark passage of time. Strike a bell or metal plate thrice. Count 20 slowly.*]

AHASUERUS [*Starting up.*]

It was not I,
It was the slave Harbonah poisoned him,
Not I. I was not there. I never knew.
Horrible white face with the blotch of death;
Harbonah gave it in the honey cake—
The honey cake, I never gave it you.
I was not at the feast, it is well known
I was most sick that night.

[*He wakes.*]

Merach! Merach! begone! It was not Merach,
But someone at the footing of the bed.
Someone, a Jew, with bones instead of face
And blood that dripped.

[*He gropes at foot of bed. He rises.*]

O blessed night, so full of peace, so calm,
After that horror.
Ah! I know it now,
What the Chaldean told me long ago,
That I should know no quiet rest at night,
Being a King, unless I ate of bread
Baked in a house where sorrow never came.
O blessed bread, would I could eat of thee!

[*Goes back.*]

Guards! are the gates secure?

GUARDS [*Off*].

God save the King!
The King's gates are made sure, and the gates' keys
Here, under guard. May the King live for ever

[AHASUERUS *comes down centre, then half way back to* GUARD.]

AHASUERUS.

The sentries on the walls; do they report
All quiet in the city?

GUARD.

All, great King.

AHASUERUS.

No armed men moving, no suspicious thing?

GUARD.

Nothing, O Son of Heaven, but silent darkness,
And here and there a priest of the great sun
Praying long life and blessing on our Monarch.

AHASUERUS [*Coming down*].

Long life, long misery!

[*Count* 10 *slowly.*]

It is within this room the horror is—
That thing, that Jew, that thing out of the grave.
No, nothing, nothing! I can see there's nothing.
So—I will sleep. I will repeat that song

Made long ago by one who could not sleep,
To help his fellow-sufferers.

[*Repeats.*]

Along the beach a wave comes slowly in,
And breaks, and dies away, and dies away;
The moon is dimmed and all the ropes are taut.

Along the beach a wave comes slowly in,
And breaks and dies away, and dies away,
It is no season, sailor, to quit port.

Along—etc.

[*He sleeps.*] [*Count 10 slowly. Enter* GHOST OF THARES *Right. The* GHOST *comes behind* AHASUERUS *and across stage to Left Centre. It stands still and hinnies like a snipe.*]

AHASUERUS [*In his sleep*].

O no! Spare me! Spare me!
Loose me my hands. O they have tied my feet!
I cannot get from bed, and now they come.
Merciful Gods! my thigh-bones are both broken.
I cannot stir. Who is it gibbering there?
Who are you? Who?

THARES [*In a disguised, piping voice*].

The shadow of what I was,
Come for your blood.

AHASUERUS.

I'll give you gold—my kingdom—
But let me go!

THARES [*Creeping slowly across, hands out*].

I cannot, Ahasuerus,
I want your life, the soul out of your body.
See, I come nearer and a little nearer,
A little nearer still, and put out hands—
Lean, skinny hands, that used to serve your food,
Thin hands to put your powerless hands aside
And take you by the throat as now I do,
And squeeze, and squeeze the life out of your flesh!

[*He begins to strangle* AHASUERUS.]

AHASUERUS [*With effort*].

Ah, gods! He kills me! Kills me!
Out, O gods!
Hydaspes! Help!
Hydaspes! Guards! Hydaspes!

[*Exit* THARES, *L.*]

HYDASPES [*R.*].

Lord!

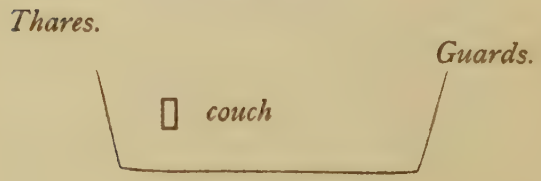
AHASUERUS.

The villain strangled me. It was a dream.
A dreadful dream! And yet I knew his face.
Who was the man? One who made plots against me,
And died, from torture, as a due reward.

Who was the man?
Go, bring the records here,
The wise Chaldeans and the record-writers,
And let them read the records, for I know
The man's name will be there.
[*Exit* HYDASPES, *L.*]
It was his spirit.
An evil thing, a harbinger of evil,
A plotter coming as the vulture comes
Before the corpse. But the Chaldean scribes
Will know his name, and by their magicry
Tell me what evil comes.
Thares it was—
Thares, the man was, who was put to death
For plotting with the other, Bigdana.
[*Goes back.*]
Let pass the wise Chaldeans when they come.

THE GUARD [*Off*].
God save the King! May the King live for ever!

CURTAIN.



ACT III.

SCENE.—*The Throne Room of* AHASUERUS. *Throne Settle.*

[HYDASPES *discovered.* HAMAN *enters Left.*]

HAMAN.

Why do you bring me to this fearful place
Even before the dawn?

HYDASPES.

You trust to me:
Anywhere else we might be overheard.

HAMAN.

What is the secret that you wish to tell me?

HYDASPES.

Lord, I know well that I have sworn to you
To tell you all the secrets of the palace.

Hydaspes.

o o *Haman*

The King is overwhelmed in utter gloom.
During this night a ghastly dream has scared him;

In the calm silence of the night he shrieked;
I hurried in; I found him babbling wildly,
Talking of peril threatening him with death,
Of enemies, of evil, and of Esther.
And in these horrors did he pass the night;
Then, weary from the sleep which fled from him,
He tried to clear his spirit of the horror
And bade men bring him in the written records,
Telling of all his glory, and his reign.
There in his bed he rests while these are read.

HAMAN.

What portion of his reign is being read?

HYDASPES.

All of his glorious time since he was King.

HAMAN.

Has he forgotten now his ghastly dream?

HYDASPES.

He has assembled all his great magicians
Who read the will of Heaven in darksome dreams.
But you yourself seem troubled as by dreams;
You seem dismayed; have you some secret trouble?

[HAMAN *turns*]

HAMAN.

Can you ask that, and see my situation?
Hated, feared, envied by the men I crush
[*Folds arms.*]

HYDASPES.

Ah! upon whom has Heaven smiled more gently?
You see the whole world prostrate at your feet.

HAMAN.

The whole world? Every day a filthy slave,
With brazen brow, disdains and injures me.

HYDASPES.

Who is this enemy of State and King?

HAMAN.

You know, perhaps, the name of Mordecai?

HYDASPES.

Chief of an impious and rebellious race?

HAMAN.

Yes, he.

HYDASPES.

Lord, can so weak a foeman trouble you?

HAMAN.

The insolent scoundrel never bows to me.
When all the Persians bow with holy awe
And dare not raise their foreheads from the earth,
He, proudly seated, with unbended head,
Treats all my honour as impiety
And looks at me with a seditious brow;

And day and night he haunts the palace door.
Always, when I go out or enter in,
His hateful face afflicts me and pursues me,
And all night long my troubled spirit sees him.

[*Right down Stage.*]

This morning, I, though up before the dawn,
Found him before me, smeared with filthy dust,
Dressed all in rags, all pale; but still his eye
Kept underneath the ashes the same pride.
Dear friend, how does he dare this brazen boldness?
You, who see all that passes in the palace,
Do you believe that friends encourage him?
What backing has he?

HYDASPES.

My Lord, you know that it was he discovered
The bloody plot of Thares to the King.
The King then promised to reward him well,
Though since that time he has forgotten it.

HAMAN.

I as a young child came among the Persians;
I govern now where I was made a slave;
My wealth is equal to the wealth of kings,
Only my forehead wants the royal crown.

[*Crosses to Right in front of* HYDASPES.]

Yet all my honour is but little to me
While Mordecai at the palace entrance
Tortures my spirit with a thousand daggers,

And all my grandeur seems to me as none
While that vile slave is lighted by the sun.

HYDASPES [*Moves down to Left*].

You will be rid of him in ten hours time;
The whole Jew race is promised to the vultures.

HAMAN.

Ah! 'tis a long, long time to my impatience.
[*Sits on throne.*]
Listen. I'll tell the story of my vengeance.
It was through him, who would not bow to me,
That I have caused this sentence that destroys them—
Vengeance too little for a man so foul.
For when one dares affront a man like Haman,
The following vengeance cannot be too great.
One must have vengeance
Such as will make the universe to tremble,
So that the whole Jew race be drowned in blood.
I wish that some day in the startled centuries
A man shall say: "Yes, once there were the Jews,
An insolent race that covered all the world;
But one of them dared stir the wrath of Haman:
Immediately they disappeared from earth."

HYDASPES.

Lord, is it your Amalekitish blood
That secretly excites you to destroy them?

HAMAN.

I know the bloody feud there was of old
Between the Jews and the Amalekites;
But I am so attached to worldly greatness,
I do not feel this racial prejudice.
Mordecai is guilty, that suffices;
And so I stirred Ahasuerus' mind;
[*Change of voice to venom.*]
I told him lies, invented calumnies,
Touched him with fear, and left him terrified;
Told him the Jews were arming,
Rich, seditious,
Their very God hateful to other gods.
I told the King "These strangers only hope
To wreck the peace in which we find ourselves.
Strike them," I said, "before they strike at you
And fill your treasure-houses with their booty."
I told him, he believed me, and at once
The King gave me the seal of Royal Power.
"Save me," he said, "protect our royal peace,
Ruin those scoundrels and their wealth is yours."
All of the Jewish race was thus condemned,
I and the King arranged the day of slaughter.
But to await ten hours that traitor's death
Is too much anguish to my aching heart.
Something, I know not what, poisons my joy:
Why must I see that scoundrel ten hours more?

HYDASPES.

Can you not have him killed with but one word?
Lord, ask the King to give him up to you.

HAMAN.

That's why I am here, seeking a fitting moment.
You know as well as I this pitiless Prince,
How terrible his sudden rage can be;
Often he breaks the network of our plans.
[*Pause.*]
My fear too subtly works to torture me:
The Jew to him must be too vile a soul.

HYDASPES.

O why delay? Go, build the gallows for him.

HAMAN.

There's noise—I go. If the King calls for me—

HYDASPES.

Enough.
[*They go off Left to wings. Enter* AHASUERUS *and* ASAPH.]

AHASUERUS.

So then, without this faithful information,
Two traitors would have killed their King in bed.
Let people leave me;
[*Exit* HYDASPES *and* HAMAN.]
Asaph, stay with me.
[ASAPH *behind* KING. KING *sits on throne.*]

I must confess I had forgotten them,
Almost forgotten their most bloody crime;

And now this reading brings it back to me,
I see again the end their crime achieved
And how by torments they were put to death.
Now, of that faithful subject, whose quick eye
Unravelled all the thread of their black plot,
Through whom, in fact, Persia and I were saved,
What honour, what rewards were given to him ?

ASAPH.

They promised much, and that is all I know.

AHASUERUS.

Wicked forgetfulness of such great service,
Certain effect of my too busy life.
A Prince is ever weighed with busy cares,
Dragged on unendingly from thing to thing ;
The future troubles him, the present strikes him
But swifter than the light the past escapes him.
Ah! rather let the crime escape my vengeance
Than such rare service lose its right reward.
That man who showed such noble zeal for me—
Is he alive ?

ASAPH.

He sees the star that lights you.

AHASUERUS.

Why has he not demanded his reward ?
What distant country hides him from my love ?

ASAPH.

Lord, uncomplaining of yourself and fate,
He drags his life out at your palace doors.

AHASUERUS.

What is his name?

ASAPH.

His name is Mordecai.

AHASUERUS.

What is his country?

ASAPH.

Lord, since I have to tell you,
He is a captive Jew, condemned to death.

AHASUERUS.

He is a Jew? O Heaven, when my life
Was threatened to be taken by my subjects,
A Jew protects me from my subjects' swords;
A Jew has saved me from the Persians' vengeance!
But since he saved me, be he what he may—
Here! someone!

[*Calls. Enter* HYDASPES *Left.*]

HYDASPES.

Lord?

AHASUERUS.

Look by that door,
See if some noble of my Court is there.

HYDASPES.

Haman is at your door, since before dawn.

AHASUERUS.

Let him come in, he may enlighten me.

[HYDASPES *bows and exit. Enter* HAMAN *Left.*]

Hail, happy standfast of thy master's throne,
Soul of my counsel, who so many times
Has lightened in my hand my heavy sceptre.

o *Throne.*

o *Haman.*

A dark reproach embarrasses my soul.
I know how pure a zeal inflames your heart,
I know no lying ever stains your lips,
I know my interest only is your thought,
So tell me,
What ought a very mighty prince to do
To honour any subject whom he loves?
By what great glory worthy of a King
Can I reward a man of faith and merit?
Put not a limit on my condescension,
Think of my power ere you answer me.

HAMAN [*Aside*].

Haman, it is for you yourself you speak;

[*Comes down stage and speaks to audience.*]

What other subject could he wish to honour?

AHASUERUS.

What do you think?

o *Ahasuerus.*

o *Haman.*

HAMAN.

O King, I think of all the Persian Kings,
Remembering what they did on such occasions
But bring them back in vain into my mind.

[*He begins to move back, so that five lines from this he is slightly behind* AHASUERUS.]

How should their deeds make precedents for you?
For what are they when put beside yourself?
Your reign will serve as model to all time.
You wish then to reward some faithful subject?
Honour alone rewards a noble mind.

[HAMAN *gets behind to Left of* AHASUERUS.]

Lord, I should wish that he, that happy mortal,
Should, like yourself, be decked to-day in purple,
And wear a sacred crown upon his brow,
And go through Shushan with the world to see,
Riding upon your war-horse gloriously.
And as a crown to this magnificence,

[*During these lines he comes forward down stage, and, though speaking to* AHASUERUS, *is carried away by his own eloquence.*]

Let some great Lord, magnificent in power,
The next man in the Empire to yourself,
Lead the proud war-horse by the bridle rein;
And let the proud Lord in his courtly dress,
Cry with a high voice in the public places:
"Mortals, prostrate yourselves, 'tis thus the King
Crowns faith and honours merit."
[*Pause.*]

AHASUERUS.

I see that wisdom's self inspires you,
In every point your judgment backs my will.
Go, lose no time; what you have said to me
I wish in every point to be made good.
Virtue no longer shall be hidden here.
Go then, O Haman, to the palace gates.
[*Pause.* HAMAN *shows joy.*]

There you will find the poor Jew Mordecai—
[*Pause.* HAMAN *shows more joy.*]

He is the man whom I desire to honour.
Order his triumph, march before him, you;
Let your voice ring through Shushan with his name,
Let every knee bend wheresoe'er he comes.
Now leave me, all.

HAMAN [*Aside*].
Gods!
[*Exit* HAMAN.]

AHASUERUS.

Never has subject gloried in such honour,
But yet I show how deeply I can fear
To be ungrateful;
And the world will see
The innocent distinguished from the guilty.
Yet all the same, that loathsome race of Jews—
[ESTHER, RACHEL *and* CHORUS *enter Left, crouching.*]
What insolent mortal comes to look for death,
Entering without my orders?
Guards! Guards! What, Esther, you?
You here and unexpected!

ESTHER [*Swooning*].

O children, hold your Queen!
[RACHEL *on* ESTHER'S *left, and* 1ST *and* 2ND CHORUS *support her.*]
I die!

AHASUERUS.

No, Esther, what do you fear?
No; do not think
I made this bitter order against you.
Live, for you see I stretch my golden sceptre
Towards you, as a witness of my pardon.

ESTHER.

What friendly voice commands that I should live?

AHASUERUS.

Do you not recognise your husband's voice?

ESTHER.

Lord, I have never witnessed save with fear
The majesty upon your kingly brow;
Judge then the terror in my troubled soul
To see that brow in anger against me.
What daring heart could see without a shudder,
Or bear the light that glitters from your eyes
Like the bright anger of the living God!

AHASUERUS.

O sun! O fires of immortal light!
I too am troubled and can hardly bear
To see, as now, her terror and dismay.
O Queen, put by the terror that o'erwhelms you,
You are the mistress of my kingly heart.
Come, test my friendship for you. What you will—
What will you have? The half of my possessions?

ESTHER.

And can a King, obeyed by the whole world,
[*Kneeling*]
Before whom all must bow and kiss the dust,
Look with such kindness on his meanest slave?

AHASUERUS.

This sceptre, and this Empire, and this terror,
And these profound respects, and all this pomp,
Bring little sweetness to me and fatigue me,
Believe me, Esther. But I find in you

A grace that charms me and that never tires,
Nothing but innocence, and peace, and beauty,
That drives the darkness of my troubles from me
And makes less fearful all the rage of foes.
Therefore, without this terror, answer me:
Tell me what thrilling business brings you here,
What care, what trouble, makes you shudder thus?
Speak; you have but to ask, to have your will,
If ought you wish is in a mortal's giving.

ESTHER.

O goodness of my King!
Indeed a thrilling business brings me here.
Here I await my happiness or death;
All, mighty King, depends upon your will;
One word from you may end my agony
And make me happiest of the queens on earth.

AHASUERUS.

Speak! You inflame my wish to hear your trouble.

ESTHER.

Lord, if I found a favour in your eyes,
[*On her knees.*]
If ever you consented to my prayers,
Grant before all that I this day receive you,
My lord and sovereign, at a solemn feast,

And grant that Haman be invited thither ;
For before him I'll dare to break my silence
And also tell why I demand his presence.

[CHORUS *stand.*]

AHASUERUS.

Esther, you trouble me ; yet be it so.
Let all be done as you desire it.

[*Order to* GUARD.]

You !—Seek for Haman ; let him understand
He is invited by the Queen to feast.

[*Exit* GUARD, *Left. Enter* HYDASPES, *Right. Comes down below* KING.]

HYASPES.

The wise Chaldeans are assembled here,
According to your order.

AHASUERUS.

Princess, a strange dream occupies my thought ;
The answer of the wise men affects you.
Come ! you shall hear them from behind a curtain,
And afterwards shall give me your advice.
I fear some treacherous enemy plots against us.
Follow me, Esther.

ESTHER.

You, my gentle friends,
Wait here till I return.

[AHASUERUS *and* ESTHER *go off, Right.* RACHEL *crosses Right, then turns and speaks. As she speaks the* CHORUS *come down the stage.*]

RACHEL.

What do you think, my sisters, of our fortunes?
Which do you think will triumph,
Esther or Haman?
Will God's will, or will man's will triumph here?

CHORUS.

We cannot tell. We know that God's great Hand
Is heavy on the race of Jews this day.

CHORUS.

It is because of sin, because of blood,
Blood of just men, shed in iniquity,
That we, the lost, are trampled to the mud
And are condemned to die in slavery.

Soon, when the evening comes, our foes will seek
All of our race. Their bloody swords will slay
Men, women, children, all, the strong and weak,
And heap our mangled bodies by the way,
To know no burial.
[*Kneel here.*]

Lord, if we search our ways and turn again,
  Surely Thou wilt forgive, and Thou wilt send
Help, like an army, mercy like the rain,
  And save us from destruction at the end.
    Save us, O save us!

The doom is cast, our murderers draw the sword,
None can avert our death but Thou, O Lord!
Without, our murderers hasten even now.
We are as dead, and none can save but Thou.

CURTAIN.

ACT IV.

In Front of Curtain, on a platform or avant-scène.

[HAMAN, ZERESH.]

ZERESH.

Here, by the still shut gate of Esther's hall,
Hark to your wife; by all that you hold sacred,
My Lord, hide your blind rage against the Jews,
Make bright that forehead shadowed now with sadness:
Kings fear reproach, and sadness.
You, chosen by the Queen, the one guest asked,
Show that you feel that proud felicity,
Show that you feel it, even through any evil.
I have a hundred times been told by you
That he who cannot stomach an affront
Nor hide his proper feelings with false colours,
Should fly from Courts and Kings.
All men have disappointments; often, too,
An outrage bravely borne, endured with prudence,
Has led a man even to the highest honours.

HAMAN.

Misery! misery, frightful to my thought!
O shame that never can be wiped away!

A loathsome Jew, the foulest of his kind,
Has now been clad in purple by these hands.
It's not enough that he should conquer me,
But I have served as herald to his glory,
While he, the traitor, mocked at my confusion ;
And all the people mocking after him,
Seeing the blushes covering my face,
Mocked me and muttered of my certain fall.
O cruel King ! And this has been your pleasure !
You only gave me honours in the past
To make me feel your tyranny the better
And drive me deeper still in ignominy.

ZERESH.

Why judge so harshly of the King's intention ?
He thinks that he rewards a generous deed.
Ought one not rather to be much astonished
That he so long has left it unrewarded ?
He has done nothing but by your advice,
And you yourself dictated all the ceremony.
In all the Empire you are next to him ;
Say, does he know how much you loathe the Jew ?

HAMAN.

The King knows well how much he owes to me ;
The King knows well how I, to make him great,
Have stamped remorse, fear, shame, beneath my feet,
And used his power with a heart of brass,
Silenced the laws, made innocent people sob,

Only for him contemned the Persians' hatred,
Cherished and sought the curses of the people.
And for reward, the barbarous King to-day
Exposed me to their mocking and their hatred.

ZERESH.

My lord, let me speak plain. That zeal you show,
That zeal of bending all things to his power,
Had it a purer object than yourself?
Take without going further this one case:
Of all the ruined Jews made desolate,
Surely you ruined them to please yourself!
Can you not rightly fear that even now
The people loathe us, and the Court detests us?

[HAMAN *turns away.*]

Lord, I *must* speak. My lord, this Jew—this Jew
Heaped now with honours, frightens me.
Misfortunes often follow on each other,
The Jewish race always brought death to yours.
Take now this morning's trouble as an omen:
Perhaps your fortune is about to leave you;
Fortune is fickle. *Act* before she leaves you.

[*She touches him.*]

My lord, what more ambition can you have?
I shudder when I see the way you take

[*He turns slightly to her. He is below her.*]

The deep abysses opening before me.
Nought but a horrible fall before our feet.
Lord, let us fly [*Here she holds him by the shoulder*], and seek some calmer fate,
Fly to the Hellespont and those far shores
Where in old time your wandering fathers were.
Let us away, away from fortune's malice!
Send on our richest treasures ere we start;
Leave me to manage; I will take the children,—
Have no more care except to hide yourself,
For the most terrible and stormy sea
Is safer to us than this treacherous Court.
But someone hurriedly is coming here!

[*Enter* HYDASPES *from below, in front, Left.*]

HYDASPES.

My lord, I came to seek you:
Your absence takes away the general joy,
Ahasuerus bids me bring you to him.

HAMAN.

Is Mordecai also at this feast?

HYDASPES.

Why do you let this image of the Jew
Torment you even as a royal guest?
Let the Jew glory in his petty triumph,
Can he avoid the fury of the King?
You rule Ahasuerus heart and soul;
The Jew has been rewarded, but next time
Will be beheaded.

We have but garlanded your victim for you.
And I suspect that you, when backed by Esther,
Will come to even greater honours here.

HAMAN.

O could I but believe your joyful news!

HYDASPES.

I heard the answers of the wise Chaldeans.
They say a treacherous stranger plots and plans
To kill the Queen.
The King, who does not know this guilty traitor,
Thinks that the plan is plotted by the Jews.

HAMAN.

Dear friend, the Jews are truly but wild beasts;
One must above all fear their daring Chief.
Earth has too long endured the horror of them,
Nature cannot be too soon rid of them.
So now I breathe again.
Good-bye, dear Zeresh!

HYDASPES.

Enter, receive the honour ready for you.
[*Curtain rises and discovers* AHASUERUS, ESTHER. HAMAN *entering. Gilded feast.*]

AHASUERUS [*To* ESTHER *at his right*].

Ah! Your last speeches have a secret grace;
All that you do displays a noble mind
Beyond all price, beyond all gold or purple.

What virtuous country bore so rare a treasure?
What wisdom reared you in your infancy?
But tell me what it is you want from me,
For all your wishes, Esther, shall be granted,
Even to the half of this my powerful Empire.
This that I promised once, I now repeat.

ESTHER.

No such great wishes, Lord; but this I long for,
Since even my King himself has bid me speak.
[*She flings herself at his feet.*]
I dare beseech you both for my own life
And the salvation of a wretched people
That you have now condemned to die with me.

AHASUERUS [*Raising her*].

To die? And you?
What people? What is this?

HAMAN [*Aside*].

I tremble!

ESTHER.

Esther, my Lord, her father was a Jew.
You know the harshness of your cruel orders.

HAMAN [*Aside*].

Ah, gods!

AHASUERUS.

Ah! what a blow! you pierce me to the heart.
You, daughter of a Jew?
You whom I love!
Goodness and innocence their very selves!

Esther, whom I believed did come from Heaven,
Is after all born from this impure stock!
Unhappy King!

ESTHER.

You can reject my prayer,
But I demand at least for a last grace
That you should hear me speak, Lord, to the end,
And above all, let Haman check me not.

AHASUERUS.

Speak!

ESTHER.

O God, confound daring and knavery!
These Jews of whom you mean to rid the world,
Whom you believe the outcasts of mankind,
Were sovereigns in a happy land of old
While they were faithful to their fathers' God:
God, only Master of the earth and skies,
The Eternal One, the Maker of the world,
Who hears the sighing of the tortured poor.
There came a day the Jews neglected Him,
They dared raise altars unto other gods,
And in a day kings, peoples, all were scattered,
And their Assyrian captivity
Became the just reward of their unfaith.
The time went by, and after many years,
The captive Jews enjoyed a happier lot.
You became King, you, friend of innocence,
Whose mercy all declared with cries of joy.
But cruel minds surround the gentlest princes
And poison even the gentlest mind with lies;

And here a ruffian from the depths of Thrace
Comes to encourage cruelty in you;
A statesman, hating you and all your glory.

HAMAN.

Your glory? I? Can you believe it, Heaven?
I, with no other aim, no other god!

AHASUERUS.

Silence!
Do you dare speak before the King commands?

ESTHER.

You see our cruel enemy before you;
'Tis he, this faithless and barbarian statesman,
Who with malignant zeal blinding your eyes,
Has armed your strength against our innocence.
Who but a pitiless Scythian would have dared
Dictate an order of such frightful horror
And give a signal through the startled world
To fill the globe with murders?
Who but he?
Under your name, most just of Emperors,
This faithless stranger desolates your country;
Even in this palace will his bloody rage
Spill your good subjects' blood.
What have the Jews done to provoke his hate?
What civil quarrel have we helped to spread?
When have the Jews marched with your enemies?
Were ever slaves more passive to the yoke,
Worshipping in their chains the God Who gives
them.

Lord, while your hand lay heaviest upon them,
They prayed their God to be a guard to you,
To break the plots the wicked made against you
And take your throne in the shadow of His wings.
And doubt not, Lord, God was your help and stay,
Beat down the Parthians and the Indians for you,
Scattered before you all the Scythian hordes
And to the eyes of one poor Jew discovered
The plans of men who plotted to destroy you.
I am that same poor Jew's adopted daughter.

AHASUERUS.

Mordecai?

ESTHER.

He was the sole survivor of our household.
My father was his brother. He, like me,
Is in direct descent from our first King.
Full of just horror for an Amalekite,
A race accurséd by the lips of God,
He would not bow the knee to Haman here,
Nor give him honours only due to you.
From this, my Lord, hidden under other names,
Proceeds his hatred against all the Jews.
In vain you gave rewards to Mordecai,
Already at the very door of Haman
Behold the gallows Haman has prepared!
Within this hour, that reverend old man,
Dragged from your palace precincts by his order
Dressed in your kingly purple, will be hanged.

AHASUERUS.

What light, what horror burst upon my soul!
[*Rising.*]
My blood is all aflame with shame and rage.
I was his plaything, then! Heaven lighten me!
One moment—let me think.
Call Mordecai. I will hear his statement.

[*Exit* AHASUERUS.]

HAMAN [*To Esther*].

Queen, I am stricken with amazement here.
I am deceived; nay, I have been betrayed
By those that hate the Jews, heaven be my witness.
By slaying them I thought to save yourself,
Use all my credit, Queen, on their behalf.
You see the King is staggered by the news.
I know how one can press or check the King;
I make him calm or raging as I please.
The interests of the Jews are sacred to me.
Speak, Queen, I swear and your dead enemies
Shall make amends if I have injured you.
Whom would you have destroyed?

ESTHER.

Go, traitor! leave me.
Jews expect nothing from a wretch like you.
O miserable man! Avenging God,
Ready to judge you, holds His balance up.
Soon shall just sentence be pronounced on you.
Tremble! God's reign approaches, thine is over.

HAMAN.

Yes, I confess thy God a fearful God;
But will He cherish pitiless hate against me?
Ah! it is done, my pride is forced to bend,
Pitiless Haman is reduced to prayer!

[*Flings himself at* ESTHER'S *feet.* ESTHER *moves to the centre.*]

By the salvation of the Jews, O Queen,
And by these queenly feet that I embrace,
And by that wise old man, your kingdom's honour,
Deign to appease the rage of this fierce King;
Save Haman, trembling at your sacred knees!

[*Enter* AHASUERUS.]

AHASUERUS.

This traitor dares to put his hands upon you!

[HAMAN *up.*]

I read his treachery in his guilty eyes,
His guilty looks confirm what you have said
And show me all the course of his attempt.
Tear the dog's spirit out this very instant
Before his door, instead of Mordecai,
And let his death appease the air and skies.
Then let his body be a public show.

[HAMAN *led away by* GUARDS. *Enter* MORDECAI *in front.*]

Man loved of Heaven, my safety and my joy,
Thy King is no more governed by the wicked

My eyes have seen the truth. Crime is confounded.
Come, shine beside me,
[MORDECAI *is led to the* QUEEN'S *seat, right of* AHASUERUS.]
ranked as is your due,
Prince of my realm and chiefest Counsellor.
I have been blind; but now, no longer blind,
I put my trust in one whom age makes wise,
And wisdom merciful, and mercy blessed.
By God's great sun your lightest word this day
Shall be a law to Persia for all time.

MORDECAI.

O King, whom heaven ever keep in care,
The peril presses on the Jews.
Lord, save them!

AHASUERUS.

They shall be saved. Come, take these orders out;
Revoke the cruel edict of that man.
[A GUARD *takes orders.*]

CHORUS.

Bountiful mercy of our guardian God,
O star in darkness, O white light of dawn,
After the night; O blessed touch of rain,
Changing the desert's salty sand to flowers;
O well of water in the blinding heat,
When even the asp goes mad; O shining city

Seen by the footsore after hours of travel;
O land, that far away, beyond wild water,
Gleams out at evening; O port of peace
After the sea; we thank Thee for this mercy.

1ST CHORUS.

Once, when of old the King of Egypt followed,
With hosts of horse, our fathers as they fled,
God made the sea a road for us to tread,
Made the rock give us drink, the desert bread,
But smote our foes, His sea rose, they were swallowed.

2ND CHORUS.

And as our fathers wandered then
God guided them to their desire
By a bright angel in the hearts of men,
And in the day by cloud and in the night by fire
Until they reached the green land full of springs,
The cornland that men reap but need not plough,
The happy hill;
All the way there God hid them in His wings,
Even as He hides us now, and ever will,
And ever will!

1ST CHORUS.

Though men deal proudly, God is over them.
[*A crying without.*]

AHASUERUS.

What is the noise of tumult in the street?

CHORUS.

Sounds as of slaying and of lamentation.

ESTHER.

O King, I dread that crying in the city!
It must be that your orders come too late
To save our fellow-captives. Swords are flashing,
And there are screams of women, and men falling.
Hark, King, they kill the Jews!

CHORUS.

O Heaven, save them!
Save us, O Heaven!

AHASUERUS.

By the fires of Bel
I am too late!

[*Enter* ASAPH, *Left.*]

What is it, Asaph? Speak!

ASAPH.

O King, my spirit faints, I cannot speak.

AHASUERUS.

Is murder being done without there?

ASAPH.

Yes.
Or no, not murder, but a red accounting,
A settling for old sin. Unseen by us,
Unseen in the air about us, our bad deeds
Grow into devils, who in our happy time,
When it is sunshine with us, startle out
And take us by the throat and shatter us.

AHASUERUS.

Are you so taken by the throat? You shudder
Like one with the fever, and your lips are white.

ASAPH.

O King, I shudder at the risk you ran.

AHASUERUS.

The Queen ran risk, not I.

ASAPH.

No. Hark, my Lord.
When you did bid us take that traitor hence,
We dragged him out, and down the corridor
Past the bronze doorways of Prince Memucan.
There, with full voice, he shouted: "Memucan,
Meres, Adathan, help me! Call our friends!
All is discovered! Save me! Kill the King!
Rush in and kill him! Save me! Memucan,
You swore to kill him. I am to be killed.
Memucan's men, come, save me! Kill these dogs,
And kill the King! You shall have all my wealth,
My silver mines, my palaces, all, all,
And be my princes."
But he called in vain.
Prince Memucan was gone, with all his men,
Gone over sea this morning at your bidding.
He called to empty courts where doves picked food
And the pale fountain trembled like an aspen.
Then, seeing that none answered, he was stilled.

A shuddering took him, and he called for drink,
And prayed that he might be brought back to you,
To tell you all the plot of Memucan,
That you might spare his life.
I, having my orders, told him he must die.
By this time we had reached his palace gate
And stood beneath the gallows he had built.
There, where he planned to murder Mordecai,
Men put a rope about his own doomed neck.
Then he besought a grace, he asked the time.
We told him, "Almost the fifth hour;" and he
Smiled haggardly and said, "Astrologers
Foretold that on this day at the fifth hour
A great event would alter life for me.
Wait till the hour, one little minute's peace,
While I pray God"
We waited, while he prayed.
And the square filled with silent men and women,
His victims, now avenged.
They were as silent as a forest is
In the great heat before a thunderstorm,
Before the first few drops strike the parchéd leaves.
But one mad woman, who had lost her son,
Babbled, "He will escape, for all their power!
It wanted but a minute of the hour
Of Fifth Hour Sacrifice. The ankle bells
Tinkled as women passed; the old priests shuffled,
Lighting the incense in the temple braziers,
And acolytes in red came to the gates.

O King, I shudder at that ruffian's guile.
Even as the trumpet of the hour sounded,
There came the clink of arms, and swordsmen came
(A band of swordsmen, Prince Adathan's men)
Up from the water gateway to the square.
Then Haman shouted, "Help, Adathan's men!
Adathan, help! See! I am Haman here.
Charge! Set upon these guards and set me free."
Then with a cheer those swordsmen charged the gallows
And bore us back, and snatched him from our hands.
But at that word of setting Haman free
Those silent watchers there, the multitude,
His victims from of old, the men ground down,
The women bartered and the children stunted,
Screamed all together in a venomous hate,
And seizing stones and sticks, or with bare hands,
They set upon those swordsmen of Adathan's
And routed them; so we recovered Haman.
And Haman bit his lips
And said: "Those were the swordsmen I had hired
To kill the Jews indeed, but afterward
To kill the King and crown me King instead.
I should have been a King at this Fifth Hour.
Only have mercy, I will tell you all."
Lord, I have looked on fire and on flood,
Both are less terrible than the mob in rage.

When he cried "Mercy," all that sea of men
Roared like a battle, rose like a toppling tide,
Swept over him and choked him out of life.
The Jews are saved; Haman is dead. The crowd
Tore him piecemeal. Now, by the rope that choked him,
They drag his corpse to be a public show.
This is the seal of office that he held.
[*Gives signet.*]

AHASUERUS.

Prince Mordecai, take this seal of office.
I give you Haman's property and power;
Possess in justice his ill-gotten wealth.
I break the fatal slavery of the Jews.
All who elect to stay in Persia here
Are henceforth equal with my Persian subjects;
All who would fain go home, are free to go.
And, so that men may tremble at the Name
Of Esther's God, I will rebuild His Temple,
Using sweet cedar where the Jews put oak,
Marble instead of stone, and gold for brass.
And may the Jews in all their solemn feasts
Keep this day's triumph holy, and my name
For ever living in their memory.

ESTHER.

O God, by roads unknown to mortal men
Thy wisdom brings eternal plans to be!

CHORUS.

Even but now our enemies beset our feet to ruin us;
But in the darkness of our doom there rose a star to lighten us!
The proud man planned to shed our blood: his voice went ringing to the sky;
His sin has turned upon himself; his bloody thoughts have made him die.
Now like a cedar that the storm uproots on windy Lebanon,
He lies on earth: I passed his haunt, but God had blown and he was gone.

[*Here the* KING *and* ESTHER *move off Right. The* CHORUS *come slowly down stage speaking, and pass off in front.*]

Esther has saved us: we are raised out of the dust: we are set free;
We may go home to Zion's hill, forgetting al our slavery.

We may rebuild the sacred town and tread the dear green fields again;
We are set free to love and live, forgetting all these years of pain.

Let us give thanks that pride has fall'n. The evils that the wicked shape
Come by one road, but God has made a myriad pathways of escape.

[THEY *leave the stage here.*]

And when the evil presses worst, seeming to triumph over good,
There comes, as here, the thing that saves, by secret ways not understood.

[THEY *pass away.*]

CURTAIN.

GLASGOW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY:

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY WOODS AND SONS, LTD., LONDON, N, 1.

Engli
NM 182
192

English
NM 492.E
1922

WITHDRAWN